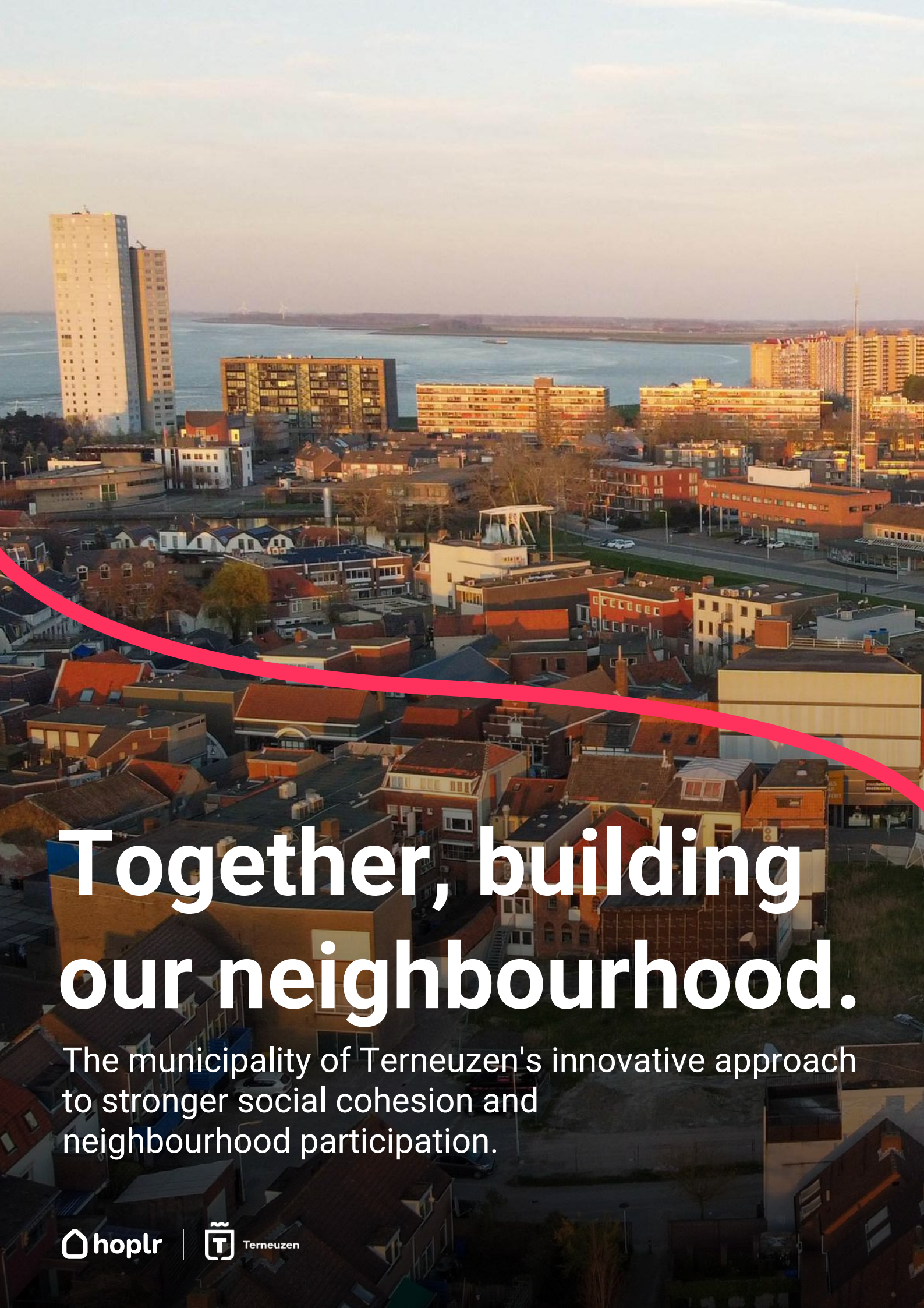




Together, building our neighbourhood.

The municipality of Terneuzen's innovative approach
to stronger social cohesion and
neighbourhood participation.

One in five households in Terneuzen is active on Hoplr's participation platform.

In the Dutch province of Zeeland lies the municipality of Terneuzen. With over 55,000 residents, it is the province's largest municipality by population. Located in a distinctive border region, Terneuzen faced a challenge: increasing citizens' involvement in decision-making. In April 2023, the municipality launched the online platform Hoplr to increase participation and strengthen ties between neighbours. We spoke to the driving force behind this initiative, Jozien Borgmeijer, Citizen and Government Participation Adviser at the municipality of Terneuzen. She enthusiastically shares her experience with Hoplr, with neighbourhood participation at its heart.



Jozien Borgmeijer

Citizen and Government Participation Adviser,
municipality of Terneuzen

5,157

Families

or 20% of households,
actively use the
platform.

60%

of citizens are
online every week.

18

active
neighbourhoods.

20%

have already taken part in
participation projects.

15%

have activated neighbour
help and are willing
to help others.

65%

of residents have
already actively joined
the conversation.



A strategic approach to neighbourhood participation.

The municipality of Terneuzen faced the challenge of creating a digital participation platform, as set out in the municipal council's governing agreement. It soon became clear that traditional participation platforms require considerable effort from government, yet often attract little citizen engagement. This did not fit their strategy: they wanted a platform where residents take the initiative and start conversations themselves, without constant government involvement.

A central place where people can find and connect with one another to exchange items, requests for help and information.

Thanks to our distinctive approach, driven by residents, Hoplr was soon seen as the ideal solution to encourage participation and contribute to a healthy neighbourhood.

Implementing Hoplr and building internal support.

Once the decision to work with Hoplr had been made, the team quickly took the first steps to implement the platform. Councillors soon embraced Hoplr, as they themselves experienced the benefits of local participation as neighbourhood residents. To them, it was clear that a platform like Hoplr would help strengthen communication with their neighbours.

Yet getting everyone on board within the municipality was not always easy. Some project managers resisted, despite the importance of participation. Colleagues feared that online participation would generate many questions and discussions, leading to delays and complications.



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Hoplr has become indispensable in Terneuzen. Councillors regularly ask us whether a particular message has already been shared on Hoplr.

It was therefore essential to guide Hoplr's implementation carefully and help colleagues take the first step. Hoplr has since become indispensable within the municipality and has rapidly grown in popularity.

Colleagues who shared projects on Hoplr now welcome residents' responses and

suggestions. Jozien is regularly asked by councillors whether a particular message has already been shared on Hoplr, because they know it is the way to reach neighbours. Hoplr is also proving to be a powerful tool in the context of the Dutch Social Support Act, something that more and more colleagues are recognising.



Hoplr: social cohesion and neighbourhood participation.

The municipality uses Hoplr not only for issues relating to the local environment, but also for social matters such as loneliness and preventive health. The platform serves as a versatile tool that reflects the needs of both different departments within the organisation and residents.



What began as a tool for citizen participation has grown into a central communication channel for neighbourhood matters in Terneuzen. Hoplr is regularly used to provide targeted information, for example about removing old and diseased trees. These posts clearly explain which trees are affected, why the decision was made and whether replacements will be planted.

This helps residents understand the situation and enables the municipality to answer questions more precisely.

Residents and associations also actively use Hoplr to help each other, positively influencing social cohesion in the neighbourhood. These initiatives are entirely driven and maintained by residents themselves.

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We play no part in that at all. It just happens by itself, and that is so wonderful.

Interaction on the platform builds familiarity: residents greet each other and feel connected. The idea that meeting online creates connections offline becomes a reality here.

Hoplr also fosters greater understanding and respect within the community. One lovely example is an appeal from someone whose brother has a disability and loves building and dismantling radios. A request on Hoplr to collect old radios suddenly gave this young man a face, and neighbours were happy to help by giving something away.

Smaller initiatives also strengthen connections. Residents give away plums from their trees, share food when they have cooked too much, lend a ladder or recommend a local electrician.

These actions spark conversations and create deeper connections between residents. You would never ask on Facebook if someone could put your bin out, but people feel able to do so on Hoplr. Because residents know each other, they feel safe, making it easier to ask for help and support one another.





Less work, more engagement.

People often assume that Hoplr creates a lot of extra work, but experience shows otherwise. In Terneuzen, Hoplr is seen as an efficient solution that creates no additional work. The initial implementation takes some time, but neighbours then largely maintain the platform themselves. They ask and answer questions, organise activities and recommend the platform to each other. This creates a lively, self-regulating system that reduces the municipality's workload.

The customer contact centre receives fewer phone calls because residents are better informed through Hoplr and questions are answered directly online. Reporting issues in public spaces now also runs smoothly through the

platform, whereas doing so by telephone used to be cumbersome. As these questions, answers and reports are visible to others, they prevent duplicate questions and repeated reports.

Another striking point is that inappropriate comments rarely need moderation, because people behave more respectfully on Hoplr than on other, more anonymous platforms. They are more likely to ask a question than to share unfounded opinions. Hoplr thus lightens the municipality's workload by simplifying tasks such as communication and reporting issues. The platform offers an accessible alternative to traditional channels without high costs.

Hoplr wins over the municipality after a year of active use.

After one year, Hoplr has achieved impressive results in the municipality. No fewer than 20% of households, or 5,157 households, actively use the platform. This was made possible by a coordinated approach: letters about Hoplr were distributed to residents, alongside a communication campaign with both unpaid and paid publicity. Participation varies by topic, but often generates around 400 to 500 responses.

Previously, participants were mainly men over fifty. Now the municipality sees much broader representation, including younger adults and more women. Another positive development is expats' involvement in Hoplr. They value being able to post and read messages in their own language, which helps them build social connections in their new surroundings. Hoplr is therefore valuable not only to established residents, but also to newcomers seeking their place in the community.

A remarkable aspect of these results is the diversity of the audience involved in Hoplr.

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The audience is now much more diverse: alongside men over fifty, there are many younger adults and a larger number of women.



Looking ahead to Hoplr's future in the municipality of Terneuzen.

Although the results are already excellent, there is room for further improvement and growth. Terneuzen aims to increase the share of participating households to 35%, further strengthening community engagement.

They also want people who have been in the Netherlands for less time to benefit more from the platform, as Hoplr can easily be translated, making it accessible to everyone.

They are also expanding communities for young people by launching 'Joplr', a dedicated platform where

like-minded people can meet. Examples include carpooling initiatives or promoting activities such as a padel tournament, specifically aimed at young people.

They also want to make greater use of available data, which can offer valuable insights for management and a better understanding of the mood in the community. Through these ongoing developments and adjustments, they hope to increase Hoplr's impact even further and better meet their community's needs.

Discover how Hoplr can support your municipality!

We are ready to explore the possibilities together.



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Terneuzen